

[At Christmas times]

Beliefs and Customs - folkways

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REMINISCENCES

"At Christmas times during the Civil War, people in Union did not have luxuries, at all. Union was only a village, and the stores did not carry much at best. Charleston was blockaded blockaded , and even Spartanburg which was not much larger than Union at that time did not carry luxuries in her stores, either in food or wearing apparel.

"Those who had money could not buy, for [it?] was not to be had. Everybody had to use parched wheat, parched okra seed or parched raw sweet potato chips for coffee. Not even tea came in. We used sassafras and other native herb teas both daily and at parties when the herb teas were in season. Some were good, but the substitute coffee was not. The darkies cut the potatoes up into small squares and parched them in the coffee parcher. This coffee needed no sugar, but for other things we used sorghum for sugar and it was a poor substitute. I liked the okra seed better than any of the coffee substitutes. ?

"Women of the South think that the cereal companies got their idea from them for making the many cereals which are on the market. Before the war, cereals like grapenuts and wheat flakes were unknown.

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“We had plenty of food during the war. The woods were dense and they were full of wild animal life, and the streams were full of fish. On Christmas the dinner tables were weighted down with turkey and other wild fowls and many delicacies from the garden, field or stream. No one ever thought of not enjoying the coffee and tea. If sugar was missed it was never mentioned. Even the darkies boasted of the fine coffee and tea [brewn?] from the herbs and wheat. ?

“Beautiful clothes were rare during the war. Most folks had to go back to the loom and spinning wheel of Revolutionary times.

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Of course the age of 1800 ushered in a new era in dress, and by the time the Confederate war came along, women wore gorgeous silks and satins, and in those days it took many yards of cloth for a dress.

“However, during the war we — my sister and I — did not have to resort to coarse homespun cloth for our clothes. A man, Mr. William Keenan, who built the house where Mrs. T.C. Duncan now lives, was a merchant. He went out of business and my mother bought four trunks full of silks, satins, brocades and linens from him about this time, which was at the outbreak of the war. Mother had these trunks stored in our attic in the house where Mrs. J. Clough Wallace now lives. That is the Meng house. Little girls could sew '[daintly?]' at the age of twelve in those days. They thought nothing of doing a tedious piece of needle work or hand embroidery at that age. However, Union had a dress maker at that time, a Mrs. Frasier. ?

“Mother, my sister and I made our clothes from the things in those trunks. We only made now clothes at Christmas time during the war, and the materials in the trunk lasted. One thing that I had to do when I was twelve years old was to wear wool stockings. One warm Sunday I was walking to church and my stockings scratched my legs. I stopped and pulled then down below my knees. My sister told mother what I stopped for. Mother made me pull

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them up again and scolded me severely. She thought that I had stopped to tie the lace of my boots. My dresses came way down below my boot tops and I wore my hair below my waist. In those days people weighted themselves down with a lot of clothes.

"Two families in Union had beautiful things until near the close of the war and they were the St. [Amaid?] and John Rogers family. Both Mr. Rogers and Mr. St. Amand were blockade blockade runners. Mr. St. Amand used to bring his little daughter, Georgianna?], gingham that 3 cost \$50 a yard. Mrs. Frasier would make her dresses for her. Mr. John Rogers brought his wife a pair of boots from Charleston that he gave \$58 for.

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"Mrs. Frasier also sewed for the Rogers. Once she, Mrs. Frasier, had a dress of English homespun with the most beautiful stripes that I ever saw. Mr. Rogers brought the material to her the third Christmas of the war. Eleven years later when I was a bride I was in Philadelphia and I went in Wannamaker's and was looking at some homespun and saw a piece exactly like that that Mrs. Frasier had had in Union during the Confederate War. I have never seen a piece of homespun so beautiful since.

"During the war Union was as gay on the surface as ever. When the soldiers came home on furlough, wounded, maimed and filthy, the women took them and cleaned them up, patched their ragged clothes and had parties and dances for them. The women of Union could and did dance and sing and make merry with aching and bleeding hearts to keep up the spirits and courage of their men folks who came home so discouraged and blue in the face of defeat. The Union soldiers outnumbered ours four to one toward the last. Women in Union did everything. They never gave up and they never stopped making much with nothing.

"During the time that Sherman was on his famous march through the Carolinas, the train often went no farther down than Alston. The train's return to Union from Alston was an event when everybody in the town went to the station to hear the news. Our gate was a

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triple gate. There was a large gate for the carriages to go through and a pedestrian gate on each side of the carriage gate. Mother went to the gate when the train stopped. The gate was only about 50 yards from the track where the train stopped. The train still stops that near the drive entrance. The soldiers or the train crew would always tell mother the news while the engine was being refueled, which took much longer than it takes now.

“The day that Fort Sumter surrendered the train went to Alston and back. Mother went down to the gate as the train pulled in. She heard the news and came in the house rejoicing. That night everybody went to the Hix house for a dance. Mother shouted with joy when she came from the train and went into her house.”

Source: Mrs. Ida Baker, E. Main St., Union, S.C. Interviewer: Caldwell Sims, Union, S.C. (11/10/37)